



A WORTHWHILE ENDEAVOUR

Dato' Sri Kandan revealed his take on success and his accidental-turned-lifelong passion in quantity surveying.

Affable, articulate and incredibly perceptive, Dato' Sr. Sri Kandan was a pleasure to talk to and willing to share his insights gleaned from his long and illustrious career. A quantity surveyor (QS) by training, he worked as a QS Consultant at Konsultant Perkhidmatan Kontrek which later became KPK Quantity Surveyors for more than three decades before he became the Chairman (and currently Honorary Chairman) for AECOM Malaysia.

"I grew up in Petaling Jaya but was born in Sri Lanka in 1950," he disclosed with a smile. "My Sri Lankan Tamil father went to Sri Lanka to be married as was the custom then. Unfortunately, the communist insurgency that had just sparked meant that he could only return to Malaysia with his new family after it ended. I was a year old by then."

Both Sri Kandan and his father had great aspirations on his career path. "My father wanted me to be a doctor while I was keen on being a lawyer," he divulged. In the end, cognizant of his family's economic constraints, he decided to take up any scholarship programme that would accept him.

He was granted a Federal Government scholarship in Quantity Surveying, a field he did not even know existed,

at the Technical College, now known as University Teknologi Malaysia. Sri Kandan revealed that he became a QS by a fortuitous accident.

"Even though the interviewer claimed that my skill sets were a good fit for Quantity Surveying, I have always suspected that I was offered a scholarship there because hardly anyone applied for a Government scholarship in quantity surveying," Sri Kandan chuckled.

This, he said, was unfortunate, as QS is a multi-disciplinary profession with excellent career paths. "You need to have a good grasp of construction, finance and law. So, in a way, I did manage to fulfil my law aspirations," he smiled.

According to Sri Kandan, quantity surveyors can enter many industries

other than construction due to the varied nature of the profession. "The possibilities are endless! You find that you can adapt yourself to almost any industry, be it oil and gas, aeronautical or ship building, because in every industry, they would need someone who can perform cost management and advise on contracts."

He worked at the Public Works Department (JKR) for four years after obtaining his college diploma. Then he continued his studies at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia, where he worked full time during the day and went to classes at night. "It was there that I gained a true appreciation for my profession. What I learned in the textbooks was applied to my work in the Q.S. Consulting firm. The learning

experience is phenomenal, and I became a better professional because of that."

As such, he strongly advocates for pre-graduates to go for at least a year of internship. "Anything less than that is not adequate. Those who intern for three or six months would not be given the right technical work to do, which they need to build a solid foundation on."

Upon returning from Australia in 1976, he joined Baharuddin Ali & Low as a QS and left to join KPK in 1980 as a Senior QS. "I was made a partner of the firm in 1983 at the age of 32. By then I was certain that consultancy was my forte and have never looked back since," said Sri Kandan.

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At KPK, he was also involved in many large and prestigious projects such as the Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit (KVMRT) Line 1 & 2, Pinewood Iskandar Malaysia Studios, Prince Court Medical Centre in Kuala Lumpur, the KLCC Exhibition and Convention Centre and Traders Hotel.



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Sri Kandan believes that the quantity surveyor's role in the construction industry is differentiated, transformative and vital.

In 2012, the KPK Group of Companies merged with AECOM, an NYSE-listed American multinational engineering firm that provides planning, design and engineering, consulting and construction management services.

"This is one of KPK's major achievements as we have always wanted to be part of a global organisation, and expand our offices in Asia Pacific to the world stage," explained Sri Kandan.

"More importantly, the merger provided a global platform for Malaysians to work on and through AECOM, local employees were also sent on exchange programmes to other countries," he added.

During the time when he was executive chairman, AECOM had employed more than 800 staff, making them one of the largest consultancy practices in the country.

Sri Kandan practices leadership by example. "I, myself, learned by observing the great leaders around me. And as a leader, you must treat people well to be able to draw out the best in them. When you work on their strengths, they will thrive and grow, and the company will also grow with them. So everyone wins."

Among other services, quantity surveyors are responsible for calculating and managing project costs and are involved from the start of the project until the construction is completed to oversee the capital expenditure. They can be found on the site and in the office, and have to quickly respond to issues and specification and costing changes.

"It is a great vocation for people who do not like routine work as no two projects are the same. You will prepare budgetary cost estimates, undertake financial feasibility studies, prepare tender and contract documents, conduct cost analyses, cost design changes, recommend interim payments and ensure a satisfactory conclusion of the final accounts.

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You'll also need to make regular site visits where you'll assess the costs of the completed works," Kandan explained.

To stand out from the rest, a QS must consistently give good advice and actionable suggestions to the client. The main challenge a QS faces in every project is to do a balancing act between cost, time and quality. "As long as you can convince the client and see to it that the project can be completed within budget, at a reasonable quality and on time, you have done a good job," he said. "For when a client's project succeeds, you succeed, too."

In 2018, Sri Kandan garnered the 'Prominent Player Award' at The Malaysian Construction Industry Excellence Awards (MCIEA). It was truly a most-coveted achievement as the award recognises the individual who best emulates the qualities and attributes of a prominent construction industry player and has contributed significantly to the development of the Malaysian construction industry. "After 45 years in the industry, I was truly honoured and humbled to not only be recognised by my peers but also by the industry leaders," Sri Kandan smiled. "It a testament to how important a QS work is to the construction industry."

A Vital Part of the Team

"I used to be daunted by the thought that unlike architects and engineers who create, the typical QS does not create anything in their daily work," Sri Kandan divulged. "But I soon realised that this is not true at all. Our work in the construction industry is differentiated, transformative and vital."

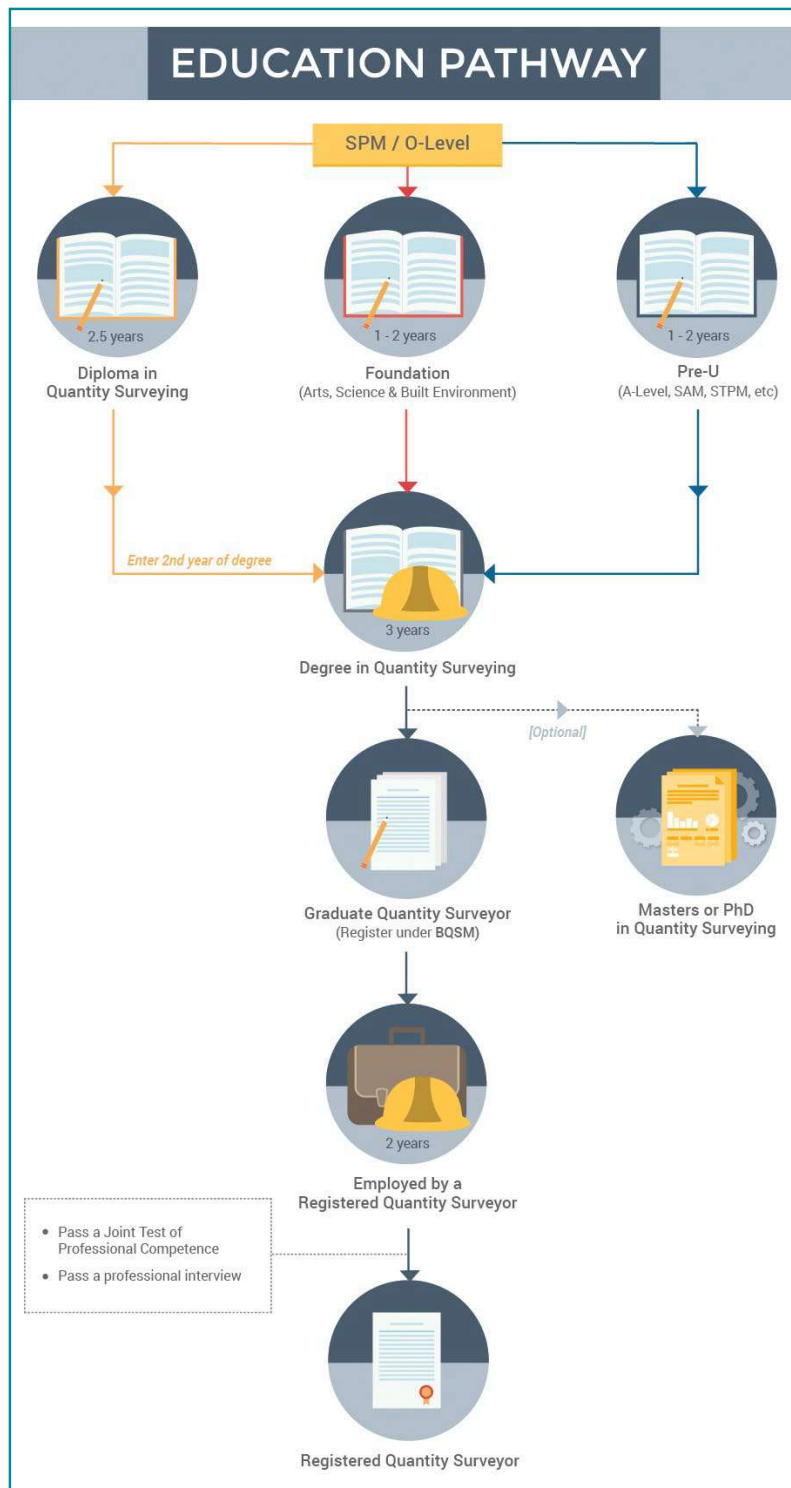
"What drives me is the knowledge that each of us in the construction industry has the opportunity to contribute in some small way towards building a better built environment and thereby building a better world."



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Qualifying as a Quantity Surveyor

To become a quantity surveyor, you'll need to complete a degree or higher education course which is accredited by the Board of Quantity Surveyors Malaysia (BQSM)



Do take note that certain universities may have higher entry requirements so, do your own research. It may take 3.5 to 4 years to obtain a Degree in Quantity Surveying.

When your Quantity Surveying Degree is accredited by BQSM, you can pursue a professional career as a Registered Quantity Surveyor in Malaysia.

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